

**Statement of the Honorable Henry A. Waxman
Chairman, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Before the
House Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service,
and the District of Columbia Field Hearing on Mail Problems
in Chicago, Illinois**

May 31, 2007

Chairman Davis, members of the Subcommittee, I applaud your leadership in holding a hearing in Chicago to examine mail service and delivery. I know all the members of this Subcommittee recognize the importance of having a mail system we can be proud of and which delivers for our constituents. To that end, I am pleased to submit this testimony on behalf of my constituents in the 30th District of California.

Since fall 2005, my office has received an unprecedented number of complaints about postal service in the 30th District. The most prevalent complaints have involved late mail delivery, misdelivery and overall poor mail service. While local Postal Service representatives have been responsive, my constituents continue to contact me about these ongoing problems.

The upward trend in complaints is notable. In 2005, my district office worked on 27 cases. In 2006, 225 postal cases were addressed. So far in 2007, my office has worked on 81 cases. It may be helpful to the Subcommittee to hear a few details of the casework my district office has addressed.

Earlier this month, my office was contacted by the director of the Santa Monica Housing Authority. The director informed my office that the Postal Service had failed to deliver correctly April 2007 rental checks from the Santa Monica Housing Authority to participating landlords. This was not a small mistake. The rental assistance checks at issue totaled \$1,187,868.

While some of the checks were misdelivered, others were not delivered at all. Forty-six (46) checks were "returned to sender" or were marked "address unknown." Stop payment orders had to be issued for another twenty (20) checks totaling \$78,426. The housing authority has yet to be billed for the stop payment orders. City staff was in constant contact with affected owners and property managers for a period of two and a half weeks as they attempted to resolve the situation caused by the Postal Service. Three of the eleven housing authority staff was dedicated to resolving the crisis.

The City of Santa Monica Housing Authority works hard to recruit and maintain owners for its subsidized housing programs. Without owner participation, voucher based programs can not fulfill their intended purpose of providing affordable housing to Santa Monica's very-low income population. Unfortunately, this episode continues to reflect poorly on the Housing Authority even though it was not at fault. To this day, many

owners and property managers remain convinced that the Housing Authority was at fault and consider any explanation of what actually happened as another example of bureaucratic mismanagement.

One of the most significant trends that my office has observed concerns businesses in the Beverly Hills area. Simply put, mail delivery to offices along Wilshire Boulevard is below any reasonable standard. The problems there are rooted in changes unilaterally adopted by the Postal Service. Previously, office buildings along Wilshire Boulevard had mailrooms that were run by the Postal Service and had postal employees permanently located in the buildings, commonly referred to as VIM rooms. VIM rooms allowed the tenants in these buildings to pick up their mail as early as 11 a.m.

At the beginning of 2006, the Postal Service stopped using VIM rooms and withdrew their employees from the office buildings along Wilshire. Instead, the Postal Service opted to deliver mail directly to individual offices. This change dramatically affected mail delivery time. Businesses that used to receive mail at 11 a.m., started receiving mail as late as 4-5 p.m. On some occasions, deliveries would come after the offices were closed.

Receiving mail so late in the day makes it extremely difficult to act quickly on time sensitive matters. It is unreasonable for a business to have to respond to time sensitive issues with less than an hour before the final mail pickup at 5 p.m.

In November 2006, the Postal Service informed my office that in order to make sure that mail delivery occurred in a timely manner, all mail was required to be at the mail processing plant in downtown Los Angeles by 6 p.m. As a result of this requirement, the Postal Service changed the pick up times for outgoing mail to 3:15 p.m. Once again, the businesses along Wilshire were adversely affected due to inadequate time between mail delivery and pick up. Once again, my office contacted the Postal Service and the Postal Service changed the pick up times, but only for those offices that had contacted my office to complain.

In early 2007, a City of Los Angeles ordinance changed the traffic patterns along Wilshire Boulevard, making the street a no stopping zone between 4 and 7 p.m. Pick up times along Wilshire were once again impacted and moved to 3:15 p.m. The time these businesses have to respond to daily mail has once again been restricted to a small window of opportunity.

I regret to report that almost halfway through 2007, business owners along Wilshire Boulevard continue to complain frequently about late mail delivery.

I have also been hearing from constituents who have experienced delayed periodical deliveries. For example, I was contacted by two UCLA professors who use international journals and professional magazines to keep up with current trends and learn about new research in their areas of expertise. The journals and periodicals they rely upon, however, are continuously late, arriving anywhere from six weeks to six months

after publication. Both professors have contacted the Postal Service for assistance and delivery temporarily improves, only to deteriorate after a short period. This is consistent with the experience of numerous other constituents. Service improves after an inquiry with the Postal Service, but after a month or two things go downhill again. This pattern is unacceptable.

Perhaps the most compelling example of the Postal Service's difficulty with deliveries involves a constituent living in Park La Brea, a large apartment complex with 200-300 mail deliveries per day. I originally heard from this constituent in January 2006 because his mail was often misdelivered or never delivered at all. Throughout the year, he was missing phone bills, bank statements, and important documents from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

This constituent told my office about an instance in which the Postal Service was late getting him an order of prescription eye drops. So late, in fact, that the eye drops had expired before they arrived. The expiration on the package was September 11, 2005, but the drops were not delivered by the Postal Service until September 12, 2006 – a full year after expiration

After working on his case with the Postal Service for over a year, this constituent's delivery problems were addressed when the Postal Service assigned a regular carrier to the route and began working with building management to ensure updated labels in each resident's mailboxes. Notably, management at the Bicentennial Post Office – the post office at issue in this case -- changed three times during the year my staff was working to address this issue.

In the category of poor customer service, my office has received a large number of complaints regarding the Exposition Post Office. My constituents inform me that there are not enough clerks staffing the windows, resulting in long wait times and lines forming outside the post office. One constituent asked the manager why there aren't more clerks working, and the constituent was told that the Postal Service does not have enough funding to hire more staff. This is the same story my office has been hearing in response to complaints regarding substandard service in the district since 2005.

Another significant factor causing late delivery has been the closure of the Marina del Rey mail processing plant. Since its closure, mail going to the western part of Los Angeles must be trucked downtown then back to the western part of the city rather than going to the Marina facility which was also located on the western side of Los Angeles.

In response to concerns about this routing, I asked the Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) to evaluate mail delivery in this area. The OIG issued a report confirming the fact that the closure of the Marina del Rey facility is a major factor in poor and late mail delivery. I am awaiting the results of another OIG report (Post Implementation Review) which examined whether the Postal Service fully realized projected savings when mail was moved from Marina del Rey to the Los Angeles processing facility.

I am very disappointed that the Postal Service has been unable to correct the ongoing issues raised by my constituents for the past year and a half. I have promised them I will work to restore quality and timely mail service to the district. To solve fully problems with staffing, management, equipment, customer service, and transportation, the Postal Service must adopt comprehensive reforms that allow for long term corrections and solutions. I urge the Subcommittee to continue its important work to ensure that the quality of postal service in Los Angeles and throughout the United States improves.

Thank you for allowing me to submit my testimony today.